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CHAPTER I

My Life in the Desert

[14] Badawin life has been so often and so well described by such giants
129 in Arabian knowledge as Doughty, Musil, Philby, Bertram Thomas and others, that I feel timid in recording my own experiences. I am constrained to do so, however, by the thought that even I may be able to add a little to the knowledge that has been accumulated about a people, who are perhaps more lovable than any other race on earth, for I have had the good fortune, during my seven years' life among the Muntafiq and Khamail Arabs of the Euphrates, my two years' duty in Bahrain and Hasa, and last but not least during my subsequent seven years' sojourn in Kuwait as H.M.'s Political Agent, to have lived, moved about and camped among the nomad Badawin* in their own tents and as one of themselves. During these years, and in particular during my service in Kuwait, I learned to like and respect the Badawin and gained an insight into his life which I shall never regret.† I was blessed with a wonderful partner, who loved the Arab woman, her charming ways, her wonderful courage, simplicity and pride of race even more perhaps than I did her menfolk. This enabled me to acquire through her a knowledge of the thoughts, manners and occupations of these daughters of Arabia and descendants of Hagar, which few others have had a like chance to gain. Two factors in particular have helped me to win the confidence of the Arab and have assisted not a little in furthering my investigations. First, the fact that I was wet-nursed by an 'Anizah woman of the Mizrab section of the Ruwala, and so can claim milk-brotherhood with them. Secondly, the fact that I have spoken Arabic from childhood.

103 * In Arabic *al badia* means the nomad-inhabited desert; *al bada* or *al badawi* (feminine: *al badawiyah*) the desert-dwelling nomad, whom in English we call the "Badawin". The nomad naturally does not refer to himself as a Badawin, but rightly styles himself an Arab. I use the word Badawin as both a singular and plural noun and as an adjective.

† Since quitting official life I have continued to reside in Kuwait as a member of the Kuwait Oil Company.

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854 saddle bags with its head out. After this age the baby is practically never washed; and it is taken out of its swaddling clothes only at night and then for only short periods.

The idea underlying the swaddling clothes is firstly, to keep the baby quiet, and secondly, to make it grow strong and straight.

853 The baby is fed at any hour of the day and night, or whenever it cries. It is not immodest for a Badawin woman to feed her baby in

Nursing.

the presence of her menfolk, or even of strange men; and I have often seen women to whom I have been talking, open their front garment and bring out a breast to suckle their infant.

BADAWIN NAMES

109 552 The Badawin frequently name men and places after parts of the human body. Some of the best-known examples are given below.

Places.

Al Sirra—"The Navel"; a hill near Kuwait.

Al Dibb—"The woman's breast"; a hill in the Neutral Zone south of Kuwait.

Al Nuhaidain—"The maiden's breasts"; two small twin hills in Kuwait.

Kaabar al Adi—"The gazelle's nose"; a hill 40 miles north-west of Kuwait.

Dhaia'ir al Dhaba—"The Hyena's Mounds"; a group of low hills 25 miles south-west of Kuwait.

661 *Men.*

Zib Salmaan—"Dog's penis"; cognomen of Khalid al Hithlain, present Shaikh of the 'Ajman.

Ab 'al Kilab—"Father of Dogs"; cognomen given to Naif al Hithlain, late Shaikh of the 'Ajman.

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Jinns' Work

mena were common to the Al Rimal or Al Ramla (Rub'al Khali) and were always the work of Jinns (spirits).

(d) Individual Murra, he said, themselves often came out of the great desert "mad", which made them sing and laugh in strange manner. This was undoubtedly due to Jinn influence.

(e) The word Rub' al Khali, he said, was a *badiya* or townsman's expression, and Badawin did not know the name, and he himself had only once or twice heard it.

(f) Rāshid knew seven of Philby's guides personally when he made his great cross-desert journey; one of them, Falah abu Ja'sha, was his cousin. (See page 10 of Philby's book; also first part of this chapter.)

THE DEAD WOMAN WHO NURSED HER CHILD

(Recounted by Dhuwaihi bin Khamit of the 'Awazim on 21st April, 1935, in camp at Malah, Kuwait.)

A man of the 'Awazim was once travelling near Hail with his young wife. The latter was with child, and in a gorge between some high rocky hills she suddenly gave birth to a baby boy, but in the process died. Her husband did all he could for her, but as he was alone, he could not save her. He buried her by putting her body in a small cave nearby, and filled up the entrance with stones. Loth to remove the child, still knowing it would shortly die for lack of milk, he laid it on its mother's breast with her left arm round it, and put the mother's left breast to the baby's mouth. He then rode away.

Nine months later a party of Badawin of the same tribe happened to wander by and camp close to the spot where the woman and child had been buried. Knowing the story they went to the cave's mouth to see if the wall was intact. To their surprise they found a few stones removed and a hole in the wall; outside on the sand they found the tracks of a child's feet running all over the ground. In great fear and filled with superstition they quickly rode away from the haunted place. In camp *of* that the Badawin told the father, who hastened to the spot, and found the hole in the wall and the small footmarks. Looking inside the cave, he found a live boy-child sitting and prattling beside the mummified form of his dead wife. The mother's body was all dried up, except her left eye and the left side of her face, her left